

Before the  
Federal Communications Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of	)	
	)	
Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization	)	WC Docket No. 11-42
	)	
Lifeline and Link Up	)	WC Docket No. 03-109
	)	
Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service	)	CC Docket No. 96-45
	)	
Advancing Broadband Availability Through Digital Literacy Training	)	WC Docket No. 12-23
	)	

**Advancing Broadband Availability for Low-Income Americans through Digital Literacy Training**

The Alaska State Library works with the 100 public libraries in the state of Alaska. These libraries are in all regions of the state and serve 77% of the state's population. The largest public library is the library system in Anchorage serving a population of 293,000, and the smallest is the Lake Minchumina Community Library in a remote community of 17 people where there are no roads and mail is delivered twice, once or no times per week depending on weather conditions. Of these Alaska public libraries, 63% are off the road system, so the public libraries' free internet access is for many residents an important connection to other parts of the state, the rest of the country, and our global community. The majority of the rural and remote libraries, even after the various ARRA projects are deployed, receive their internet via satellite. Thirty-eight of these libraries serve communities that are predominantly Alaska Native (50-99%) and another 7 receive financial support from their local tribal entities.

*We believe that availability and cost are the biggest barriers to broadband adoption in Alaska. As a BTOP grant recipient, the Alaska OWL (Online with Libraries) project has procured broadband services for public libraries where costs can run as high as \$9,000 month for a T-1 connection ( 1.5 Mbps up and down). However, now that our project and other BTOP and RUS projects are underway, we see the need for digital literacy training in areas where adults have not had access to interactive internet in their libraries or their homes in the past.*

Therefore, we file on behalf of these Alaska public libraries and the Alaska citizens that that they serve.

## Public Libraries as Suitable Location for Digital Literacy Training

Public libraries are logical places to provide digital literacy training. They are, in many cases in Alaska, the only location where free public internet access is available to adult residents. There are no internet cafés in these communities, and in some cases there are no stores. In some small villages, the school, the post office, and the public library may be the only public buildings. In 30 of our communities, the community library is located in the school. Schools vary in their ability to open their computer resources to the general public, but public libraries by their very mission are open to all of the community, the digitally literate and those who have yet to put their hands on a mouse, a touch pad, or cell phone. Public libraries, even in Alaska's most remote villages, have public access technology and staffs who help the public make their leap from one side of the digital divide to the other. *A systematic way of training people who are making steps toward digital literacy could definitely be provided in public libraries, but small staffs and limited training opportunities for them mean that assistance in providing a more comprehensive digital literacy program will be necessary.*

Because of the nation's large recent investment in infrastructure through ARRA funding, there is an urgency to make this build-out useful to people who previously have had limited or no access to the internet, much less interactive capabilities through broadband access.

Because public libraries are community gathering places, they are logical places for formal digital literacy training, but they also provide opportunities for a ripple effect when those who become digitally literate train other family members and friends. People who have not been users of broadband may see other people making use of the library's public access computer to do daily business and may be encouraged to learn more. This latter effect may not accrue in situations where people learn their skills in the privacy of home or even in formal classroom settings. In Alaska, a "train-the-trainer" approach is frequently taken in which there is always an implicit obligation to return to one's community and to "pass it forward" by formally or informally teaching the newly acquired knowledge or skills to others. The Alaska State Library would encourage the Commission to adopt this "pass it on" philosophy in its digital literacy campaign and training program. Given the rapid development of technology, digital literacy requires a set of knowledge, skills and abilities that require life-long learning to maintain, and public libraries are the life-long learning institutions in most communities.

Libraries have been *de facto* trainers, because the expectation by library users has been that access to hardware and bandwidth comes with the usual customer service that people expect at their libraries. A digital literacy grant program would allow librarians in small or busy but underfunded libraries to become true trainers rather than always hurrying to learn with their public. It would also allow them to incorporate training about the vast array of electronic resources that are available through public libraries.

Low-income residents are most likely to be in need of digital literacy training. They are already heavy users of public library resources. Apart from the unavailability or unaffordability of internet service, another obstacle holding back low-income rural and remote Alaska residents from digital literacy is lack of free or inexpensive training.

### Development of Digital Literacy Curriculum and Group Applications

It would seem logical for some USF savings to go toward providing a template or basic training curriculum so these efforts do not have to be re-invented library by library, state by state. It also seems more efficient and effective to allow group applications so that each library or school is not applying for the relatively small grants proposed as stand-alone efforts. Likewise there would be efficiencies of scope and scale even as libraries customize training to their particular public, the locally spoken languages, and the mode of delivery most suited to their users who have not been born digital. Groups of libraries that serve the targeted population could collaborate on acquiring the services of trainers, creating curriculum and sharing best practices. Therefore, we ask the Commission to allow state libraries or other appropriate agencies to apply on behalf of public libraries in low-income areas of their states.

### Match Requirement

Operating budgets of Alaska libraries in small and remote communities, where the need for training is greatest, are stretched thin keeping the public, books, and technology warm during most of the year. Requiring a match of any size would be a deterrent where heating oil bills and electricity are far above the national norm. According to the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, in January 2012, the average price of #1 heating oil in Western was \$6.49/gallon with highs as much as \$7.53-\$9.00/gallon in Interior and Western Alaska. Some communities are primarily subsistence economies where cash is in short supply, and community work is done by unpaid collective effort. These are the communities that now are gaining access to bandwidth and equipment through new initiatives, but where the adult population may not have had the opportunity to become digitally literate.

### Administration of the Program

Although we hope that the filings for this FNPRM will result in a digital literacy training grant opportunity for public libraries, we are concerned that the funds not come from the E-Rate program where demand exceeds funding availability.

In view of the complexity of the E-Rate process, we think that administering a digital literacy program through E-Rate, no matter what source of funding the FCC chooses, would make applications for the relatively modest proposed grants unnecessarily complicated and might deter proposals from staff in small libraries where the funds might have the biggest impact.

Respectfully submitted on April 2, 2012 by:

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